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Seventeenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 1777 (2007), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) until 30 September 2008, and requested me to report on the progress made in achieving the core benchmarks set out in my report of 8 August 2007 (S/2007/479) and, in view of the extent of that progress, to recommend by 15 August 2008 any further reductions to the UNMIL military component and confirm, as appropriate, my recommendations for reductions in the police component, provided that there was sufficient progress in the training of the police. The present report provides an update on major developments in Liberia since my report of 19 March 2008 (S/2008/183) and presents recommendations for adjustments to the second phase of the UNMIL drawdown.

2. I had the opportunity to visit Liberia on 21 and 22 April to witness at first hand the progress and remaining challenges in the country's peace consolidation and economic recovery efforts. The visit allowed me to meet with the full Cabinet and both Houses of the legislature, as well as with United Nations personnel in Liberia.

II. Major developments

3. Significant progress has been made in several important areas in the country as explained in detail in section II.A-D and section III of this report. The political situation has remained generally stable while key economic and social indicators have continued to improve. On the economic front, the level of external debt has been significantly reduced, Liberia has reached the decision point under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and the Government has finalized its first national poverty reduction strategy following broad-based consultations in all counties and districts throughout the country. The annual economic growth rate in the country has increased to 9.4 per cent, owing in part to stronger domestic private sector activity and the signing of key concession agreements.

4. The overall situation remains fragile, however, as shown by an analysis of potential risk factors in the country and the national institutions' ability to address and contain possible fallouts from those threats. This analysis draws on the findings

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of the joint security assessment carried out by the Government of Liberia and the United Nations in May. The findings of the assessment, which are described in more detail in section VI of this report, also provided a clear picture of the interlinked challenges facing the country, including security, rule of law, governance, economic development and unemployment among young people, including groups of ex-combatants who pose a serious threat to the Government's efforts to achieve sustained stability. In addition, despite the progress being made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Liberia is still plagued by ethnic tensions that cut across many segments of society.

5. Developments in the country also continued to be influenced by broader global economic trends. The increased value of natural resources has contributed to an improvement in the Government's revenue and has enhanced foreign investors' interest in concession agreements. At the same time it has created a stronger incentive for illegal exploitation of natural resources, particularly minerals and rubber. The recent surge in fuel and food prices could also have serious security implications, if not handled appropriately, although it should be noted that the higher food prices so far have not sparked public demonstrations as they have in other countries in the region. The political developments in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire continue to be followed closely in Liberia, since a possible deterioration of the situation in those countries could have a negative impact on Liberia's borders. Since my last report, a significant voluntary return of Liberian refugees, especially from Ghana, has been organized and will need to be monitored carefully since the scale and pace of the return could risk causing local disturbances.

A. Political situation

6. During the reporting period, the relationship between the legislative and executive branches of government continued to improve, allowing for the passage of important bills and ratification of major concessions agreements in the economic sector. However, other major bills, including the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission Act, the Code of Conduct Act, and the Defence Act, are still pending. The delay in the passage of some bills has implications for some of the Mission's benchmarks in the security area. The improved relationship and dialogue between the arms of the Government, particularly in a situation where the President's party does not hold the majority of seats in the legislature for the first time in Liberia's history, is encouraging.

7. The Government has continued to pursue its programme of political and constitutional reforms as well as national reconciliation. In this regard, the Government has mandated the Governance Commission to make recommendations to the legislature following broad-based consultations. The Commission has developed a road map for the process, but the appointment of the Constitution Review Task Force has been delayed. The Governance Commission has also undertaken nationwide consultations on the establishment of a Land Commission to deal with all land matters, and draft legislation has been presented to the legislature. This is a welcome initiative, given the frequency of land disputes which, in recent months, have claimed several lives and destroyed properties. In the meantime, the implementation of activities funded by the $15 million allocation Liberia received from the Peacebuilding Fund to foster national reconciliation and conflict

management is ongoing, and the Joint Steering Committee has approved seven project proposals.

8. The National Elections Commission, in collaboration with political parties and UNMIL, continued consultations towards the strengthening of the party system with a view to transforming the political parties into viable structures that would also promote national reconciliation. However, the slow progress in the process of constitutional reform is a drawback for the national programme of political and structural changes, including the envisaged role of a strengthened party system.

9. Meanwhile, the provisional figures from the 2008 national population and housing census were released in June. According to the enumeration, the population of Liberia was 3,489,072 as compared to the 1984 census figure of 2,101,628, which constitutes an annual growth rate of 2.1 per cent. The legislature and the National Elections Commission have begun consultations to redraw the electoral constituencies on the basis of the new census figures.

B. Security situation

10. The overall security situation in Liberia remained generally stable, but fragile. The Liberian State is at peace with itself and its neighbours and the country is enjoying its fifth year of peace and stability, which is unprecedented since the start of the conflict in 1989. However, the prevalence of law and order incidents, including mob justice and random violence, which have become a major national security concern, underlines the tenuous state of the security situation in the country. There have been a series of mob attacks on several police stations and court houses to free suspects or to administer instant justice, and the burning of a hospital to protest against the unavailability of emergency medical personnel. UNMIL personnel and installations have also been targeted by violent mobs. Troops and officers of formed police units had to be deployed to all United Nations installations in Monrovia in March to prevent further damage to United Nations property by former UNMIL individual contractors who were protesting against the termination of their employment with UNMIL.

11. Other threats to sustained peace and stability in Liberia include violent disturbances in many of the rubber plantations across the country, demonstrations by former personnel of the security forces, student protests and violent criminal activities, especially armed robbery and rape. The high number of young people unemployed has the potential to undermine peace and security. In addition, frequent ethnic tensions and land disputes between communities as well as between communities and commercial enterprises continue to be of concern. In a disturbing escalation of land disputes, 14 farm workers in Kakata, Margibi County, were murdered and 5 are still missing in a land dispute involving a Senator and a political rival, underlining the potential for a local conflict to escalate into a national crisis.

12. On 23 July, the President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, signed into law an Act amending the Penal Law of 1976, which will make the crimes of armed robbery, terrorism and hijacking non-bailable capital offences and punishable by hanging, if deaths occur as a result of the crime. In a statement to the press, the President stated that, although she was aware that Liberia was a signatory to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which seeks to abolish the death penalty, she signed the Act to address the appeal from a majority

of people for a robust response to the increasing crime rate. The President promised to revisit the Act as soon as there was a significant reduction in the rate of armed robbery.

13. The activities of ex-combatants continue to be a potential source of instability, because of their illegal exploitation of resources in economic enclaves and inaccessible mining areas, in particular. This was highlighted in the findings of the joint security assessment referred to in section VI, which confirmed the ongoing illicit mining activities of large numbers of former combatants throughout the country. In order to address this challenge, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation, in collaboration with UNMIL, continued to implement a one-year reintegration and rehabilitation programme for the final group of some 7,251 ex-combatants, who have not yet benefited from any reintegration and rehabilitation programme. This programme notwithstanding, the full integration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants as productive citizens remains a major challenge.

14. Another matter of concern is drug and light weapons trafficking in the subregion and what this portends for Liberia. In May, UNMIL military and police, the Liberian National Police, the Drug Enforcement Agency and other national security agencies began a joint operation aimed at combating the cultivation and trafficking of marijuana in Liberia. The trafficking of this drug poses a threat to internal security as some of it is consumed by individuals who go on to commit crimes, in particular armed robbery, while the rest is believed to be trafficked across the porous borders into neighbouring countries.

C. Economic situation

15. Liberia's gross domestic product is estimated to have increased by 9.4 per cent in 2007, reaching $473.9 million by the end of the year, with a per capita income of $195. The economic growth has, to a large extent, been driven by the higher prices of natural resources and the expansion of the service sector. At the same time, Liberia has managed to maintain a moderate inflation rate partly facilitated by restrictive monetary control. The approved national budget for the fiscal year 2008/09 of $298 million represents an increase of more than 40 per cent compared to the previous budget. The Government's efforts have been supported by the progress made in the implementation of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme.

16. Despite the commendable overall economic progress made, it is estimated that more than 60 per cent of the population continues to live below the national poverty line, especially in the rural areas, and the key social indicators remain among the lowest in the world. It will be important to improve these numbers, not only to alleviate the hardship for the poorest segments of society, but also to counter a potential risk to the fragile peacebuilding process. One key element will be to increase agricultural production, since it can create employment and income opportunities for a large part of the Liberian population. The rising food prices globally provide an enhanced incentive in this respect. It is also essential to create a conducive environment for the private sector, including the establishment of the

necessary legal frameworks and implementation of vigorous anti-corruption measures.

17. The wider policy framework for promoting sustained growth and development in Liberia is set out in the national poverty reduction strategy for 2008-2011, which was completed in March. At the Liberia Poverty Reduction Forum, on 26 and 27 June, hosted by Germany in Berlin, the Government received a strong endorsement of the strategy from international partners. It is emphasized in the strategy that future stability, growth and development are dependent on progress within all four priority pillars, namely, consolidating peace and security; revitalizing the economy; strengthening governance and the rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services. The estimated total cost for the implementation of the strategy is approximately $1.6 billion over the poverty reduction strategy period, of which the Government is expected to provide close to $500 million from its domestic revenue. At the Poverty Reduction Forum, it was recognized that significant financing gaps remain, including for essential activities related to the development of the national security and rule of law institutions, and that international partners needed to better align with the priorities of the strategy. It was further noted that, although progress has been made, significant domestic and regional challenges still risk undermining Liberia's hard-won peace and stability.

18. During the past six months the Government has made progress in its efforts to regain control over and efficiently manage the country's natural resources, and a number of important concession agreements have been completed. The rising price of natural resources has served as an incentive for increased illicit activities, however. Within the diamond sector, although some delays have been noted, the Government has made efforts to extend its presence to the mining areas and enhance the integrity of the chain of custody system, in compliance with the requirements of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. The planned overall reorganization of the sector is still pending, including strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy to enforce the mining laws, and a number of Government diamond offices remain to be established. In the absence of a proper mining cadastral system, there is an increasing possibility of conflict between local artisanal miners and mining concession holders.

19. Compared to the diamond sector, the activities relating to artisanal gold mining have received less attention. Gold-mining areas are distributed throughout Liberia, and numerous mining camps are located in remote and inaccessible areas. In the absence of other employment alternatives, mining camps attract young males, often ex-combatants, at times maintaining their former command structures. Limited data is available on the total number of individuals involved and the number of mining camps, but it is reportedly growing. It is estimated that the majority of the gold mined in Liberia currently is unregulated and not subject to payment of royalties to the Government. The issues relating to the gold-mining sector were highlighted as a key concern by the joint security assessment in May.

20. The Forestry Development Authority, in compliance with the 2006 New Forestry Law and Public Procurement Commission Act, awarded six timber sale contracts for small-scale commercial logging for a total area of 30,000 hectares to three concessioners. Thirteen bids submitted by local and foreign companies for large-scale logging are currently being evaluated. A number of challenges relating to the demarcation of forestry zones and the promulgation of the Community Forestry

Law are still outstanding and risk delaying the commencement of commercial logging.

21. Efforts are continuing to normalize and strengthen the rubber sector in Liberia. The recent increase in the world price for rubber (more than 30 per cent just in 2008) has, however, increased the incidence of rubber theft, prompting sometimes harsh reactions against illegal tappers by plantation security units. This has often triggered violence in the surrounding communities. Given the potential for rubber to be a central component of the country's recovery, the Government/United Nations Rubber Plantation Task Force has begun developing reforms to better regulate the rubber market, which would increase the domestic revenue by reducing the illegal sale of rubber and also help smallholders to maximize their revenue. Meanwhile, the plan to transfer the Sinoe rubber plantation to an interim management team has been delayed, owing to the need to clarify a number of legal and fiscal aspects closely linked to the plantation.

22. Despite the economic growth experienced during the last years, employment generation remains a key challenge in Liberia. A joint initiative of the Government, the World Bank, UNMIL, UNDP and the World Food Programme, aimed at rehabilitating primary and secondary roads, has provided short-term employment opportunities for over 60,000 Liberians during the past two years. Local communities along major transit roads, together with ex-combatants and returnees, have benefited from these initiatives, which have promoted economic recovery and helped to improve security and stability at the local level. These measures are of an emergency nature, however, and in order to further consolidate peace in Liberia it will be necessary to create more sustainable employment in the future, especially for the country's youth. It is hoped that the new concessions and increased foreign investments over time will contribute towards achieving this.

23. The recent global increase in the prices of basic commodities has emerged as a new, additional challenge in Liberia. The Government has responded rapidly by adopting a three-pronged strategic framework focusing on mitigating domestic price increases; support to the most vulnerable households; and promoting domestic food production. The framework is supported by an innovative joint programme on food security and nutrition in Liberia of approximately $140 million, which combines the efforts of the Government, the United Nations and the World Bank. The Government has furthermore reacted by suspending tariffs on the importation of rice and agricultural equipment, materials and supplies. At the subregional level, the Governments of the Mano River Union agreed to a common regional strategy to mitigate the impact of the rising prices of basic commodities.

D. Humanitarian situation

24. Although the humanitarian situation in Liberia has significantly improved, the country still faces challenges and its humanitarian programme is underfunded, particularly in the health, education, food security and water and sanitation sectors. The global food crisis has further aggravated the humanitarian situation and pushed more people below the poverty line. Meanwhile, with funding from the United Nations Central Emergency Relief Fund, United Nations agencies and partners completed the provision of assistance to more than 1 million vulnerable persons

across Liberia. The services provided included mass vaccination campaigns, safe drinking water and improved hygiene and sanitation facilities.

25. A new repatriation of Liberian refugees began on 16 April. Led by the Government, with support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNMIL, 4,291 Liberian refugees have been assisted to return to Liberia as at 25 July, mostly from Ghana, bringing the total number repatriated since the start of official repatriation on 1 October 2004 to 116,684. UNHCR estimates that 72,000 Liberian refugees still reside in various countries in the subregion and other countries. The Government and the United Nations are exploring ways of assisting returnees to resettle and reintegrate into their former communities. These include support to grow food, training in income-generating activities and educational support. Issues of access to land and property are also being addressed by the Government.

E. Regional dimension

26. Although the security situation along the borders with Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea remains stable, the continuing uncertainty in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea presents a potential threat to stability in Liberia. The slow pace of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, as well as potential difficulties surrounding the elections scheduled for November in Côte d'Ivoire, are being closely monitored in Liberia. Similarly the uncertainties with respect to the political process in Guinea are of serious concern to Liberia. A serious deterioration in the situation could have a direct and immediate impact on the Liberian border counties which are populated by ethnic groups that straddle the international borders. In the meantime, UNMIL continues to conduct operations with the security forces of Sierra Leone and Guinea, as well as with the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, to deter cross-border movements of weapons and other illicit cross-border activities.

III. Achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Mission's mandate

A. Security sector reform

National security strategy and architecture

27. During the reporting period, further progress was made in the reform of the security sector. The President has approved the national security strategy, which incorporates the country's security architecture with a regulatory framework. An implementation matrix, which is aligned with the national poverty reduction strategy and vital UNMIL consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal benchmarks, has also been developed. Challenges remain, however, not least ensuring effective local ownership and capacity to sustain the development of the security sector, as well as its strategic coordination.

Armed Forces of Liberia

28. The United States of America continues to lead the international support for the training and restructuring of the new 2,000-strong Armed Forces of Liberia. To date, 1,631 recruits have completed the basic training. Basic training for the last batch of 500 recruits and training for 29 officer candidates commenced in June. While these developments are welcomed, it is hoped that the tempo will be sustained as the development of the armed forces is one of the Mission's core benchmarks. Any further delays will make it impossible for the new army to be fully trained before late 2009 to enable it to commence joint exercises and training with UNMIL troops. The effective operational capacity of the Armed Forces of Liberia, even with enhanced mentoring by UNMIL forces, would require a sustained effort over time. Though 45 recruits have thus far been commissioned as officers, their command effectiveness towards the expected hierarchical structure in an army requires time.

Liberian National Police

29. The Government of Liberia, with the support of UNMIL, has made appreciable progress in the reform and restructuring of the Liberian National Police, including training, provision of equipment and infrastructure and deployment into the counties. UNMIL has provided basic training for 3,661 officers, including 344 women, while more than 1,000 officers have received specialized training. Significant challenges remain however, in the development of the police. According to the findings of the joint security assessment referred to in section VI, the very weak operational capacity of local security sector structures and rule of law institutions, especially with regard to the police, makes it difficult to contain threats to peace, including mob violence.

30. The Liberian National Police continue to struggle to achieve a level of sustained operational effectiveness that will enable them, independently, to provide the quality and efficient service which the Liberians are entitled to demand of their police. While there is a greater presence of the Liberian National Police in the interior of the country, their reach is limited and their capacity is weak, owing to the absence of basic logistical support, including vehicles, communication equipment and gasoline for daily and routine operations. With the support of UNMIL and other international partners, the Government is addressing some of these infrastructure challenges, including the construction and/or renovation of several police stations and barracks and the purchase of vehicles and other logistics. Further limitations in terms of individual officer competencies, particularly in leadership and specialized areas, and limited budgetary allocations also have to be addressed. The practical import is that the United Nations police advisers and formed police units are daily called upon to support the Liberian National Police in mounting operations critical to the maintenance of law and order and to sustain the emerging peace and stability in Liberia.

31. The training of the first and second batches, of 76 and 67 officers respectively, for the Emergency Response Unit is ongoing, albeit at a slow pace, because of funding gaps and delays in the arrival of equipment, including weapons, ammunition and uniforms. Recruitment and retention of officers for the Unit is also a challenge, owing to uncertainty about incentives for personnel of the Unit. Recruitment of women has been particularly difficult, and there is only one woman

among the officers currently in training, although 16 have applied as candidates for the third batch. Funding for the training and equipment of the Emergency Response Unit has so far been entirely dependent on donor support and it is now evident that the first 200 officers of the planned 500-strong Unit may not be fully operational by July 2009 as indicated in the Mission's benchmark. Additional funding is therefore needed from both external sources and from the Government's budget to accelerate the development of the Emergency Response Unit.

32. Recent disciplinary problems and misconduct within the national police force have also raised concerns regarding low morale and demonstrated systemic weaknesses in command and control. As part of efforts to address some of the problems, the Liberian National Police, with support from the United Nations police, are developing the capacity to effectively investigate complaints of misconduct through the establishment of a Professional Standards Division. The Liberian National Police and the United Nations police are also trying to address performance issues including absenteeism by verifying and certifying all officers on the payroll across the country. Thus far, 3,105 officers on the payroll have had their positions, rank and employment status verified.

33. In order to address the challenges identified in a focused and coherent manner, United Nations police, in collaboration with the Liberian National Police and UNDP, organized a workshop in Accra, aimed at developing a long-term strategic plan for the institutional development of the force. The workshop helped the Liberian National Police to discuss and formulate recommendations to address issues of professional standards, the need for a Police Council, logistics and maintenance systems, human resource development and effective management. The workshop also underlined the need for increased donor support and improved government budgetary allocation.

34. The control and effective management of Liberia's borders remains a security challenge. Of the 176 points of entry into the country identified by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, only 36 are considered official. In addition the Bureau's personnel lack the appropriate equipment, training and infrastructure to perform their tasks. In order to ensure proper mentoring and training of the Bureau's officers as they deploy to the border, the number of United Nations immigration officers will be increased within the overall United Nations police strength. The development of the Bureau's capacity has so far been dependent on donor support but this has not been forthcoming. Given the history of past conflict in the subregion, including in Liberia, it is important to develop the capacity of the Bureau to control the movement of persons across the international borders of Liberia. For the moment, the presence of UNMIL troops along the borders helps to deter illegal cross-border activities.

B. Strengthening judicial, legal and correctional institutions

35. The reform and strengthening of judicial and correctional institutions need to proceed in parallel with the reform of the police in order to build a society that is based on the rule of law. Although progress has been made, the administration of justice countrywide continues to face serious challenges. These include the lack of adequate funding, shortage of qualified judicial officials, the lack of infrastructure including courts and prisons, archaic rules of procedure, inadequate numbers of

qualified judicial and legal officers, poor case management, low salaries and corruption. As a result of these deficiencies, many Liberians have little confidence in the justice system.

36. Efforts are under way to address some of the capacity-building issues. In this regard, a Judicial Institute was launched on 17 June, to provide sustained training for judicial officials. UNMIL has prepared a guidance bench book for magistrates and is now working in collaboration with the Government in preparing a prosecutorial manual as a reference handbook for prosecutors. The Government with the support of UNMIL is also considering a paralegal programme to address the gaps in the public defence system. Two fast-track projects funded from the Peacebuilding Fund have recently been approved for rule of law outreach in south-eastern Liberia. In the meantime, the draft bill for the establishment of the Law Reform Commission is being finalized by the executive before submission to the legislature.

37. With respect to the corrections system, UNMIL has, with support from donors, trained 143 correction officers since 2005. In addition, 66 correction officers who recently completed their basic training at the Police Academy are currently undergoing practical training at correction facilities. However, these numbers are not adequate to run all the correction facilities in the country and further recruitment and training of new correction officers has been suspended for lack of funding. Although the Governments of Liberia and Ghana have signed a memorandum of understanding to train a number of Liberian correction officers in Ghana, this will not be adequate. Furthermore, most of the correction facilities are in a deplorable state and need further improvements in order to meet minimum acceptable standards.

38. As a result of the weak criminal justice system, most of the correction facilities, including the Monrovia Central Prison, remain overcrowded despite the opening of the new women's block at that facility and the reopening of the National Palace of Corrections in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County. It is hoped that the recent revival of the Case File Management Committee, which reviews jail delivery, will help to bring down prison congestion. Twelve cells in Gbarnga, Bong County, and another block of 12 cells in Tubmanburg, Bomi County, were recently constructed with donor support. Owing to the urgent shortage of staff and the poor working conditions at the correction facilities, jailbreaks and disturbances often occur. In view of these challenges, it would be necessary to increase the number of correction advisers within the overall strength of the United Nations police.

39. Another significant challenge to progress in the rule of law is the absence of a coherent strategic plan agreed to by all stakeholders to strengthen this sector. This has constrained coordination among the principal partners within the rule of law sector, which is vital for the effective functioning of the justice system. A national rule of law retreat that will bring the executive and judicial branches together to develop a national strategy is one mechanism being proposed to improve the needed cooperation and coordination. It is hoped that this will materialize very soon, since a national strategy is likely to facilitate enhanced donor support.

C. Promotion of human rights

40. Although the human rights situation in the country continues to improve, the weakness of rule of law institutions continues to impede the protection of human rights. Apart from the problem of shortage of qualified personnel, there are recurring reports of court officials who continue to apply rules and procedures in an inconsistent manner, fail to observe minimum human rights standards and engage in corrupt practices. Prolonged pre-trial detention of suspects continues to be observed throughout the country. In addition, trial by ordeal is still prevalent in some areas, in part because of the absence of functioning courts and police in remote areas.

41. The enactment of the Rape Amendment Act in 2006 is still not having a strong impact in stemming the high incidence of sexual violence, including rape of women and children. The prosecution of cases of sexual violence continues to be hampered by deficiencies in the criminal justice system and the regular dismissal of cases owing to out-of-court settlements between the families of the victims and the perpetrators of the crime. It is also common for State agencies to facilitate these negotiated settlements that provide avenues for the agents to gain private financial benefits.

42. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has completed its public hearings in all 15 counties and commenced thematic hearings in July. The Commission previously requested a three-month extension of its mandate, but on 15 July asked the legislature for nine months, until 30 June 2009. The Independent National Commission on Human Rights is still not operational because of the delay in the appointment of Commissioners. Amendments to some provisions of the Act establishing the Commission to bring into harmony various laws relating to and supportive of the Act were submitted to the legislature by the President on 3 June. A national human rights action plan, which is long overdue, has still not been developed.

D. Consolidation of State authority

43. The restoration and consolidation of State authority throughout the country, at both the national and the local level, remains a critical priority. A positive development is that several capacity-building initiatives are ongoing and that the local administrative presence has been increased, not least through a higher number of ministry representatives outside Monrovia, but the overall impact in terms of increased efficiency remains limited. The work continues to be hampered by logistical factors as well as by weak human resource and management capacities. The county support teams, which have been established to ensure coherent and consolidated United Nations support to local authorities in all 15 counties, continue their work to facilitate the implementation of county action plans under the leadership of the county superintendents.

E. Gender

44. The Government, with the support of the United Nations Gender Theme Group, has produced a draft report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A National Women's Conference was

convened on the development of the national action plan for women as well as the finalization of the national strategy on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the national gender policy. It is furthermore a priority for UNMIL to ensure that the gender policy directive for peacekeeping operations of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) continue to be integrated throughout the implementation of the Mission mandate.

F. HIV/AIDS

45. UNMIL continues to collaborate with the Government of Liberia to conduct awareness training for military, police and civilians within the Mission and Liberia at large. It also continued to promote HIV/AIDS awareness through participation in a live UNMIL Radio phone-in programme.

G. Public information

46. The information activities of UNMIL continue to support the priority programmes of the Mission, as well as those of the United Nations agencies, the Government of Liberia and civil society aimed at consolidating peace and security, encouraging reconciliation and promoting national recovery. The Mission organized a series of outreach events and radio programmes to promote reconciliation and to support the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Development and the Ministry of Justice, the Mission launched the first phase of the nationwide anti-rape campaigns in March to respond to the high number of rapes in the country.

H. Personnel conduct and discipline

47. UNMIL continues to focus on developing strategies to prevent, identify, report on and effectively respond to all categories of misconduct on the part of United Nations personnel. It also focused on strategies to ensure the implementation of the Secretary-General's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse through training, awareness-raising and attention to the welfare concerns of all categories of United Nations personnel. During the reporting period, six "category 1" cases (serious misconduct) were reported, of which three were cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. Investigations of the three cases are ongoing. In addition, 47 "category 2" (minor misconduct) cases were reported.

I. Security and safety of United Nations personnel

48. The staff of the Mission continued to experience security and safety hazards. The safety concerns are related to crime, in particular armed robbery, which frequently targets United Nations employees, both national and international. Other threats include violence and mob justice which occur spontaneously and in which United Nations personnel may be accidentally caught up. The poor state of infrastructure and basic services, including health services, are also hazards. Traffic accidents are also a safety issue, sometimes with fatalities and injuries to staff and

Liberian nationals. Between January and August, one UNMIL national staff member, two UNMIL individual contractors, four military, three police and one international civilian staff member died as a result of illness, vehicular accident or drowning.

IV. Financial aspects

49. The General Assembly, by its resolution 62/263 of 20 June 2008, appropriated the amount of $603.8 million, equivalent to $50.3 million per month, for the maintenance of UNMIL for the period from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNMIL beyond 30 September 2008, the cost of maintaining the Mission until 30 June 2009 would be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

50. As at 30 June 2008, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNMIL amounted to $67.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $1,671.4 million. Reimbursement of contributing Governments for troops and formed police costs has been made for the period up to 31 May 2008. As at 30 June 2008, amounts owed to troop and formed-police contributors totalled $13.7 million.

V. Mission deployment

Military component

51. By its resolution 1777 (2007), the Security Council approved my recommendation to reduce the military component of UNMIL by some 2,450 troops from October 2007 to September 2008. Accordingly, three infantry battalions and three infantry companies were repatriated, leaving the Mission's troop strength at 11,728. The Mission is now in a hold and review period to prepare for the commencement of phase 2 of the drawdown.

52. UNMIL continues to provide security to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. With the anticipated termination of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone at the end of September 2008, UNMIL is making plans to provide its Mongolian military guard force assigned to the Special Court with administrative and logistical support for its operations.

Police component

53. In compliance with resolution 1777 (2007), the UNMIL police component began phase 1 of its drawdown in April, which involves a reduction in the number of police advisers by 105. As at 1 August, the police strength stood at 1,092, including 464 police advisers, 5 immigration officers and 604 formed police unit officers, as well as 19 correction officers.

Drawdown benchmarks

54. In my report of 8 August 2007 (S/2007/479), I indicated that the drawdown process would be linked to specific core and contextual benchmarks, which include (a) completion of basic training of 3,500 personnel of the Liberian National Police

by July 2007; (b) finalization of police operating procedures by December 2008; (c) formation of the 500-strong Police Emergency Response Unit by July 2009; (d) equipping and deployment of police personnel to the counties, as well as building of police infrastructure by December 2010; (e) finalization and implementation of the national security strategy and architecture and their implementation throughout the country by December 2008; and (f) training and operationalizing of the first and second battalions of the Armed Forces of Liberia by September 2008 and September 2009, respectively. The contextual benchmarks identified in that report included the restoration of the rule of law and the strengthening of State administration and authority in all 15 counties, together with elections in Sierra Leone in 2007 and in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in 2008.

55. As outlined in earlier sections of this report, progress in meeting some of the indicators for these benchmarks has been slow, particularly with respect to the strengthening of the justice sector, improving the operational capacity of the Liberian National Police and the Emergency Response Unit, implementing the national security strategy and building the capacity of national institutions. UNMIL will continue to monitor progress being made in meeting these benchmarks during the next reporting period.

VI. Recommendations

56. The drawdown plan proposed in my report of 8 August 2007 provided for a three-year implementation timeframe with built-in hold and review periods to assess the security situation and core benchmarks, as well as to adjust the pace or depth of the troop and police adjustments, as necessary. As part of the review and stock-taking exercise, the Government of Liberia, UNMIL and the United Nations country team carried out a joint security assessment in all 15 counties from 12 to 24 May, to assess the level of security threats and to evaluate the capacity of national and local institutions to respond to those threats. The Government participants comprised representatives of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Defence and National Security, the Liberian National Police, the National Security Agency, and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. The joint security assessment highlighted a number of critical challenges that affect the implementation of the Mission's mandate and the achievement of the core drawdown benchmarks.

57. The joint security assessment teams confirmed that in the majority of the counties there has been no significant change in the security threat level since the last assessment, which was reflected in my report of 8 August 2007. In a few counties, the security situation has deteriorated, however. It was only in the north-western counties that the security situation was assessed as relatively benign. Overall, the main threats to peace and stability emanate from law and order maintenance issues. The common threat factors that were identified in this regard include the weak operational capacity of the security and rule of law institutions and the public loss of confidence in those institutions as a result. Other factors were the competition over natural resources, including widespread illegal exploitation of those resources, as well as the potential regional instability and food insecurity, which is a new element. Consequently none of the assessment teams recommended the total withdrawal of UNMIL military or police personnel from any of the current locations.

58. On the basis of the findings of the joint security assessment and taking into account progress made in the core benchmarks, UNMIL, together with a technical assessment mission led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which comprised representatives of the Office of Operations, the Office of Military Affairs, the Police Division, the Criminal Law and Judicial Advisory Section in the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Safety and Security, undertook a detailed review of phase 2 of the UNMIL force and police drawdown plans.

Military component

59. Following consultations between UNMIL and the technical assessment mission led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, I am recommending that phase 2 of the drawdown of the military component, which runs from October 2008 to September 2009, should involve the repatriation of a further 1,460 military personnel, which would include 850 troops (one battalion), 40 staff officers, 82 military observers, the sector 2 headquarters (230 personnel), the sector 4 headquarters (68 personnel), and 190 personnel from the Mission's military police, military engineering and military administrative units. These repatriations would reduce the UNMIL troop strength to 10,231 personnel by September 2009. It is also proposed that the current four sectors should be streamlined into two.

60. Although the recommended troop reduction represents a larger number than I had proposed for the second stage in my report of 8 August 2007, I am confident that UNMIL will be able to continue to discharge its mandate of maintaining a stable and secure environment and providing the necessary security umbrella throughout the country to enable the Government to continue its reform and restructuring programme. The proposed plan will ensure that all counties and major towns and strategic locations (docks, airports etc.) that are currently covered by UNMIL forces will continue to have UNMIL presence, albeit at reduced numbers in some areas assessed as relatively benign.

61. The plan takes cognizance of the Mission's security responsibilities along the borders. UNMIL also has contingency plans for dealing with potential fallouts from external developments as well as its obligations under resolution 1609 (2005) to reinforce the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire if necessary. The Mission will also continue to provide security to the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

62. During phase 3, which should run from October 2009 to December 2010, the Mission's preliminary plan, which will be subject to review by a technical assessment mission, envisages a further reduction of 2,100 troops. This would bring the strength of the UNMIL force to 8,131 troops at the end of phase 3, in December 2010.

Police component

63. The Security Council, in its resolution 1777 (2007), approved my recommendation for the gradual reduction of the UNMIL police component by 498 police advisers from April 2008 to December 2010. The drawdown plan had envisaged that the police component would increasingly focus on providing strategic advice and expertise in specialized fields to the Liberian National Police and over time reduce the operational support to the regular policing activities (night patrols etc.) of the national police. It was also assumed that the capacity of the

national police would have been strengthened, including within their police support units, and that the establishment of an Emergency Response Unit would have progressed fairly well. However, these assumptions have not been fulfilled.

64. Consequently, it has not been possible to reduce the tasks being performed by UNMIL formed police units in the Monrovia area and transfer those units to other key "hotspots" around the country, such as Lofa, Sinoe, Zwedru and Harper. Currently, given the poor communication and road network, platoons of UNMIL formed police units are being deployed for extended periods away from their bases in order to respond to urgent security incidents in those areas. This affects the cohesiveness of the units and could compromise operational effectiveness.

65. The inability to fulfil the core assumptions also means that more support will be needed from United Nations police advisers during the next mandate period than envisaged a year ago when the Security Council adopted the original police drawdown plan. Additional support is required to ensure the necessary strategic advice, training, mentoring and institutional capacity-building in specialized policing fields to the Liberian National Police. Moreover, the National Police will still need support from United Nations police for its regular policing activities, including through joint patrolling.

66. In view of these developments and the increasing challenges relating to the maintenance of law and order throughout the country, I am proposing an increase in the number of formed police units from five to seven (from 605 to 845 personnel) with effect from September 2008. In addition, I recommend that no reductions should be made to the police advisory component during the period from September 2008 to September 2009. I also intend to make internal adjustments within the strength of the United Nations police to accommodate eight additional correction officers. This would bring the police component strength to 1,375 personnel (845 formed police unit personnel, 32 correction officers and 498 police advisers).

67. For the period from October 2009 to December 2010, the Mission's preliminary plan, which will be subject to review by a technical assessment mission, envisages a reduction in the strength of United Nations police advisers by 132 personnel. This will bring the police strength to 1,243 personnel overall (845 formed police unit personnel, 32 correction officers and 366 advisers) at the end of the drawdown period in December 2010.

VII. Observations

68. In the past year, the Government of Liberia has made steady progress in meeting its reconstruction and reform objectives. Liberia has reached the decision point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and some improvements have been made in consolidating its authority throughout the country and developing the national security agencies. In addition, I am pleased to note that the Government's poverty reduction strategy has been finalized and that it was strongly endorsed at the Liberia Poverty Reduction Forum in Berlin. Despite these achievements, the country continues to face formidable implementation challenges under all four pillars of the poverty reduction strategy. It will be important to enhance infrastructure investments and strengthen the capacity of national and local institutions, including within the security and rule of law sectors. Although partners reconfirmed support to Liberia of approximately $250 million to $300 million for

the first year of the strategy, it was acknowledged that significant financing gaps remained. I would like to strongly encourage the international community to translate the tremendous goodwill expressed at the Forum into tangible resources and support, which should be made available as soon as possible.

69. The gradual approach to the drawdown of UNMIL, which ensures the continued military deployment of the Mission throughout the country, as well as the proposed increase from five to seven formed police units and the recommended delay in the reduction of police advisers, will ensure a continuing stable security environment. This will enable the Government, with sustained support of the international partners, to make steady progress towards peace consolidation, democracy, and economic recovery.

70. The slow progress towards meeting the core security and rule of law benchmarks remains a source of serious concern. Much still needs to be done, urgently, to strengthen the capacities of both the police and the army, and facilitate their effective presence in the country. While progress has been made in police training, the improvement of the national police infrastructure, including vehicles, communication equipment and accommodation, as well as their institutional and operational capacity, require more support. This also includes the Emergency Response Unit. It is critically important, however, that support for the police reforms is matched by comparable progress in strengthening the justice system and the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation. I call on Liberia's international partners urgently to provide additional assistance within these key areas and in that respect I fully support the recommendations from the workshop in Accra focusing on the long-term institutional development of the Liberian National Police. I furthermore urge the Government and its international partners to develop a national strategy for the rule of law sector as soon as possible in order to have an overall framework for the reform efforts.

71. The progress made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is encouraging and I would like to express appreciation to the Government and those of its partners that have so far provided assistance to the Commission. I hope that this support is continued throughout the implementation of the Commission's mandate given its importance for the reconciliation process in the country.

72. The unpredictable situation in Guinea also continues to be a source of serious concern. It is inconceivable to contemplate sustained peace in Liberia in an unstable subregion. I am therefore greatly encouraged by the growing cooperation among the Heads of State and Government of the Mano River Union, including Côte d'Ivoire, in addressing the security issues in the subregion. It is my hope that the proposed elections in the neighbouring countries will be held in a peaceful atmosphere and will help to further consolidate the emerging stability in the subregion.

73. In the light of the challenges outlined above, I recommend the extension of UNMIL for a period of 12 months, until 30 September 2009, taking into account the proposed adjustments to the Mission's drawdown plan as set out in paragraphs 59 and 66 of this report.

74. In conclusion, I would like to commend the people and Government of Liberia, my Special Representative, Ellen Margrethe Løj, and all military, police and civilian personnel for the progress made in the country during the reporting period. I would also like to thank all troop- and police-contributing countries, the Economic

Community of West African States, the African Union, the International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, humanitarian organizations, multilateral and bilateral donors, as well as international and local non-governmental organizations, for their important contributions and support to the peace consolidation process in Liberia.

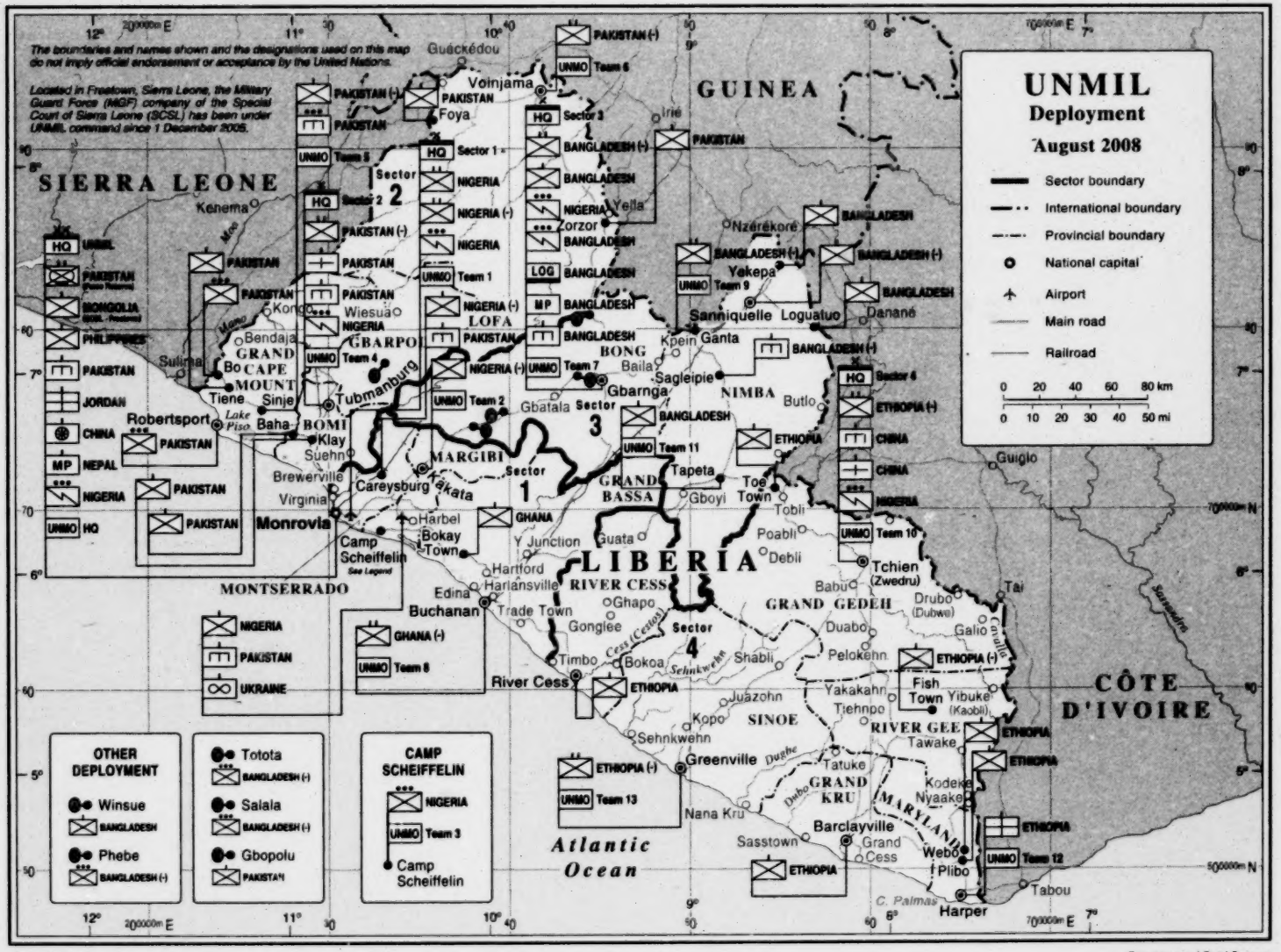
Annex

United Nations Mission in Liberia: military and civilian police strength

(as of 1 August 2008)

Component	*Military*				*Police*
Country	*Military observers*	*Staff officer*	*Troops*	*Total*	*Civilian police*
Argentina					6
Bangladesh	18	11	2 381	2 410	16
Benin	3	1		4	0
Bolivia	1	1		2	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina					11
Brazil		3		3	0
Bulgaria	2			2	0
China	4	8	558	570	10
Croatia		4		4	0
Czech Republic	3			3	5
Denmark	2			2	0
Ecuador	3	1		4	0
El Salvador	3			3	4
Ethiopia	18	8	1 779	1 805	0
Egypt	8			8	1
Fiji					30
Finland		2		2	0
France		1		1	0
Gambia	2			2	20
Germany					5
Ghana	10	9	700	719	40
Iceland					2
India					125
Indonesia	3			3	0
Jamaica					0
Jordan	7	8	115	130	139
Kenya	3	2		5	13
Kyrgyzstan	4			4	3
Malawi					9
Mali	4			4	0
Malaysia	10			10	0
Moldova	3			3	0

Component	*Military*				*Police*
Country	*Military observers*	*Staff officer*	*Troops*	*Total*	*Civilian police*
Mongolia		4	246	250	0
Montenegro	2			2	0
Namibia	2	5		7	5
Nepal	4	3	40	47	259
Niger	3			3	0
Nigeria	15	17	1 645	1 677	156
Norway					10
Pakistan	11	13	3 390	3 414	8
Paraguay	3	1		4	0
Peru	2	2		4	0
Philippines	3	5	163	171	31
Poland	2			2	3
Republic of Korea	1	1		2	0
Romania	3			3	0
Russian Federation	6			6	7
Rwanda					5
Samoa					0
Senegal	3	4	92	99	0
Serbia	6			6	6
Sri Lanka					10
Sweden					17
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia					0
Togo	2	1		3	0
Turkey					29
Uganda					17
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland		3		3	0
Ukraine	3	2	300	305	8
Uruguay					4
United States of America	7	5		12	15
Yemen					6
Zambia	3			3	28
Zimbabwe	2			2	29
Total	**194**	**125**	**11 409**	**11 728**	**1 092**



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